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MEMORANDUM

June 27, 1949

TO: Chairman, Ad Hoc Committee on Exploitation of
Foreign Documents.

FROM: Subcommittee on Coordination of Foreign Documents
Translation.

There is forwarded herewith for the consideration of the
Ad Hoc Committee a report prepared by the Subcommittee on the
Coordination of Foreign Documents Translation, in accordance with
the minutes of the meeting of 18 April 1949.

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Division, Department of State.

Foreign Documents Branch,
Central Intelligence Agency.

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COORDINATION OF TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES

Problem

To recommend policies and procedures for coordinating the translation activities of the IAC agencies and CIA for the purpose of eliminating wasteful and unnecessary duplication of effort.

Discussion

It has been recognized for a number of years that within the Federal Government establishment as a whole there is widespread and wasteful duplication of effort in the translation of documents and publications from foreign languages to English. Available evidence indicates that the same situation may exist within the more limited circle of intelligence agencies. Potentially, at least, the existence of this uneconomical duplication is more serious for the intelligence agencies, for in general the material which is most essential for their use must be translated from languages, such as the Slavic tongues, Chinese, and other Asian languages, in which the shortages of competent translators is most acute. Not only, therefore, is unnecessary duplication wasteful in itself, but is doubly harmful by dissipating the available trained translating manpower on unnecessary projects at the expense of essential work.

The obvious method of avoiding unnecessary duplication in translation is through the mechanism of a central "clearing house" from which any agency contemplating the initiation of a translation can learn whether or not another agency has already completed or is currently working on a translation of the same item.

At first consideration, such a mechanism would appear simple and efficacious. It would require the following:

- (a) The creation of a file showing completed and initiated translations;
- (b) A commitment on the part of each intelligence agency to notify the central clearing house of all translations initiated and completed;
- (c) An undertaking by each agency to initiate no translation without prior check with the central clearing house.

However, further consideration reveals a number of complications:

- (a) How is a "translation" defined and identified? Are abstracts and summaries to be considered as translations? Should all translations, regardless of their length, be included in the coordination procedure? Can adequate bibliographic methods be followed which will ensure

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identification of the original text?

- (b) It is of little value to Agency A, which intends to initiate the translation of an item, to know that Agency B has already translated it, unless Agency A can actually obtain a copy of such a translation. In effect, therefore, the proposed system of coordination will be meaningless unless supported by dissemination procedures which will ensure that a translation made by one agency will be made available to other agencies.
- (c) How can adequate quality of translation be measured or assured? E.g., a translation of an article on steel furnaces in the U.S.S.R. might be adequate for the needs of the State Department, but completely inadequate for the technical requirements of the Ordnance Corps.

The Committee believes that none of these complications are insuperable, and that the detailed recommendations given below provide a workable solution.

The Committee believes, however, that in connection with the coordination of translation services there are the following fundamental problems which must be faced by the agencies concerned, and which are beyond the competence of the Committee to investigate:

- (a) Does wasteful duplication of translation effort actually exist between the intelligence agencies? If translation is considered as an extension of collection activity, then duplication should exist only in the fields of economics and science, the only fields in which collection responsibility is not clearly allocated by NSCID - 2. If translation is considered an extension of intelligence production, duplication should not exist at all, since the field of basic intelligence is clearly and completely allocated by NSCID - 7 and the NIS program. Careful consideration should be given by appropriate authorities to coordinating translation effort as a corollary to the further coordination and allocation of collection responsibility, or alternatively, allocate responsibility for translations following the allocation of responsibility already made for basic intelligence production.
- (b) What activities of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, Air Force, and CIA are to be included in the proposed coordination scheme? The Committee recognizes that even in the intelligence units of these agencies there will be translations made by individual research analysts, which it is impracticable to coordinate. Beyond this, there are numerous activities outside the intelligence sphere in each agency except CIA, which use and make translations of all kinds. Notable among these are the Research and Development Board, the Air Material Command, the Naval Research Laboratory, Air Force project "Treasure Island", etc.
- (c) What measures, if any, can be taken to prevent the intelligence agencies as a group from engaging in wasteful duplication of effort with other Federal agencies and private organizations? If it is recognized

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that security factors play an important role in consideration of this problem.

- (d) The problem of scientific intelligence, and effective implementation of NSCID - 10, will shortly raise in an acute form the question both of adequacy and of duplication of translating and abstracting services which of necessity will involve both intelligence and non-intelligence agencies.

Conclusions

- (a) Before specific procedures are adopted for coordinating translation services, the following question should be answered:
 - (1) Is there in fact sufficient duplication between the intelligence agencies to warrant the expense of setting up specific procedures for coordination?
 - (2) Can coordination be achieved by allocation of responsibility following the pattern of NSCID - 2 or NIS, or is the central clearing house mechanism necessary?
- (b) Assuming that a study of the above problems leads to the firm conclusion that a specific mechanism for coordinating translation service should be instituted among the intelligence agencies, the Committee believes that effective procedures can be set up, in accordance with the recommendations given below. These recommendations place the burden of establishing and maintaining the central clearing house operation on the Foreign Documents Branch of CIA. The operation involved may well be considered as authorized, either in pursuance of the general responsibility of CIA to recommend measures for the coordination of the intelligence activities of the Departments and agencies of the Government, or as one of the services of common concern that may best be performed centrally.

Recommendations

- (a) That the Foreign Documents Branch, CIA, undertake to establish and maintain a record showing translations completed or in progress by all IAC agencies. This record must be bibliographically accurate and adequately cross indexed.
- (b) That the other IAC agencies undertake (1) to notify the Foreign Documents Branch of the initiation or completion of all translations undertaken by the agency concerned. Such notification should be preferably written and in a form which will include all the bibliographic information required for identification and cross indexing purposes. A suggested form for this purpose is attached as Enclosure A.

(c) That

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- (c) That all IAC agencies undertake to commence no translation project without first referring the proposed project to the Foreign Document Branch and receiving assurance from FDB that the item in question has not been translated by another agency and is not the subject of current translating in another agency.
- (d) That all IAC agencies furnish to the Foreign Documents Branch one copy of all completed translations, together with a statement of the distribution already given to other agencies by the originating agency, and a statement of restrictions on further distribution.
- (e) That CIA reproduce and distribute, when appropriate, texts of translations which fall within the requirements of agencies other than the originating agency, which have not already been distributed to such other interested agencies.
- (f) That for the purposes of coordination, "translation" be defined as "the verbatim rendition into English of a foreign language text exceeding two hundred words in length."
- (g) That the Foreign Documents Branch issue at appropriate intervals a consolidated report of translations initiated and completed within the group of IAC agencies as a whole.

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